

# Memorandum

To : The Conservancy  
The Advisory Committee

Date: July 9, 2007

From :  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 11(b)2: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for interpretation of the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay Watersheds, including visitor serving amenities and naturalist led interpretive programs for the public as well as programs specifically designed for disadvantaged youth.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for interpretation of the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay Watersheds, including visitor serving amenities and naturalist led interpretive programs for the public as well as programs specifically designed for disadvantaged youth.

Legislative Authority: Section 33204(c) and 5096.650(b) of Public Resources Code.

Public Resources Code Section 33204(c): “The Conservancy may, in accordance with the priorities of the plan . . . award grants to state agencies, cities, counties, resource conservation districts, and park and recreation districts for the purpose of acquiring sites identified as necessary for park, recreation, or conservation purposes and for development of essential related public facilities.”

The State of California has authorized expenditure of funds from Proposition 84, the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for capital outlay and grants for protection and restoration of land and water resources in the watershed of the Upper Los Angeles River and the Santa Monica Bay and its watersheds.

Background:

Parkland is preserved to protect the resources found therein and to provide access to the disappearing natural world for generations to come. The challenge then is to both protect and care for those resources while providing access to public lands to the millions of urban residents who have had little or not exposure to the nature.

Research demonstrates that interpretation is an effective management tool leading to protection of resources. Educating visitors and inspiring the emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the visitor and the meanings inherent in the resources leads to greater understanding of and commitment to protection of those resources. People care for what they value and value comes from the “interpretive continuum” that starts with awareness and understanding and ends with stewardship. In the case of Proposition 84, protection” is defined as “those actions necessary to prevent harm or damage to persons, property or natural resources or those actions necessary to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources” and includes interpretation as a means of doing so. Section 75005(m).

Interpretation, as defined in the measure, includes but is not limited to, “a visitor serving amenity that educates and communicates the significance and value of natural, historical, and cultural resources in a way that increases the understanding and enjoyment of these resources and that may utilize the expertise of a naturalist or other specialist skilled at educational interpretation.” (Public Resources Code Section 75005(i)) The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has a long history of providing relevant and meaningful interpretation and education programs that not only enhance the visitor experience but promote stewardship and protection of the resources. Though interpretive signage and materials, naturalist led programs and special seminars and events, park visitors to parkland owned or managed by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy in the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay Watersheds.

Programs specifically designed for urban communities is also an important focus of this grant. The Conservancy statute, Section 33204.5 of the Public Resource Code, says “The Conservancy shall implement a program to provide recreational access from downtown Los Angeles and the inner city. . . in order to provide recreational opportunities for all income and ethnic groups wishing to enjoy the Santa Monica Mountains.” Los Angeles has fewer acres of accessible parks per person than any major U.S. city, and poor neighborhoods suffer the most. Only 30 percent of Angelenos live within a quarter mile of a park, compared with between 80 percent and 90 percent in Boston and New York.

In addition to the programs and materials developed for the general public, specific focus will be on amenities and programs which serve disadvantaged communities. This includes programs at Vista Hermosa Park and along the Los Angeles River, as well as ensuring that disadvantaged youth have access to the mountains through transportation, education and interpretive programs and overnight camping in the Santa Monica Mountains. The measure defines a disadvantaged community to be a community with a median household income less than 80% of the statewide average. A “Severely disadvantaged community” means a community with a median household income less than 60% of the statewide average. (Public Resources Code

Section 75005(g)) In addition to MRCA programs, the grant includes contracts with community based organizations such as the Anahuak Youth Association, Outward Bound Adventures and the Wildwoods Foundation, to assist and enhance the MRCA's abilities to reach out and organize programs for such disadvantaged communities.

This grant of \$875,000 will fund interpretation of the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay Watersheds, including visitor serving amenities and naturalist led interpretive programs for the public as well as programs specifically designed for disadvantaged youth, \$380,000 in the Los Angeles River Watershed and \$495,000 in the Santa Monica Bay Watershed.

The specific scope of services that will be provided, includes:

Guided interpretive programs, including program development and implementation, directly relating to the watershed's rich natural, cultural and historic resources. Programming will focus on interpretation of the site's endangered species, ecology, importance in the watershed, conservation, biodiversity, Mediterranean ecosystems, wildlife corridors, and fire ecology.

Partial funding of an interpretive newsletter, "Symbiosis" which is printed quarterly and distributed to over 2,000 addresses as well as being available at all park locations;

Monthly campfire programs at 6 locations, featuring presentations that increase the understanding and enjoyment of the outdoors, and watershed resources;

Interpretive materials, including site specific materials, program schedules, safety information and self guided interpretation that are designed and implemented to increase visitors enjoyment and understanding of the watershed;

Bi-monthly camping programs for disadvantaged youth ensuring that they enjoy the access to parklands;

Weekly River Ranger program for youth 8-12 designed to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the Los Angeles River;

Monthly Transit to Trails Program providing staffing and programs for families from disadvantaged communities to parklands of the watershed. Transportation funds for this program are provided by a separate funding source;

Twice weekly interpretive programs for youth from the community surrounding Vista Hermosa Park at this new park site;

Development and implementation of the Vista Hermosa Park Leadership Program, which will include recruitment, training and employment of young adults from the community surrounding Vista Hermosa for the purposes of increasing their enjoyment of understanding of the parks resources as well as communicating that understanding to other community members.

Weekly Wetlands Ranger program for youth 8-12 designed to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the Santa Monica Bay Watershed and specifically the Ballona Wetlands;

Development and implementation of a volunteer program at Temescal Gateway Park modeled after that of the William O. Douglas Outdoor classroom, in order to increase the number of visitor serving amenities available to the public at this extremely popular regional facility.

Development and implementation of a watershed institute and related programming at King Gillette Ranch including

See budgets in attached applications.